

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA  
WAYCROSS DIVISION**

KASIM GANDY,

Plaintiff,

v.

HOMER BRYSON; TOM GRAMIAK;  
EDWINA JOHNSON; JOHN BOYETT;  
NATHAN BROOKS; WILLIAM STEEDLY;  
AUSTIN ADAMS; KIMBERLY LOWE; and  
UNIT MANAGER COX,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: 5:16-cv-44

**ORDER and MAGISTRATE JUDGE’S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Plaintiff, who is currently incarcerated at Ware State Prison in Waycross, Georgia, submitted a Complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that Defendants violated his constitutional rights. (Doc. 1.) The Court has conducted the requisite frivolity review of that Complaint. For the reasons set forth below, I **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff’s monetary damages claims against Defendants in their official capacities, all claims against Defendant Bryson, all punitive and compensatory damage claims, and Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment claims. Additionally, the Court should **DENY** Plaintiff’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction and request for declaratory judgment. (Doc. 6.) However, Plaintiff states plausible Fourteenth Amendment due process claims against Defendants Tom Gramiak, Edwina Johnson, John Boyett, Nathan Brooks, William Steedly, Austin Adams, Kimberly Lowe, and Unit Manager Cox as well as a plausible First Amendment claim against Defendant Adams. Accordingly, the Court **ORDERS** that a copy of Plaintiff’s Complaint be served on those

Defendants. The Court provides additional instructions to Plaintiff and Defendants pertaining to the future litigation of this action, which the parties are urged to read and follow.

### **BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>**

Plaintiff entered Ware State Prison on May 7, 2015. (Doc. 1-1, p. 3) Upon arrival, prison officials placed Plaintiff in a Tier II Segregation Housing Unit based on his disciplinary history at Rogers State Prison. However, Plaintiff claims that he did not meet the prison's Standard Operating Procedure's requirements for placement in a Tier II Unit and did not receiving an opportunity to contest his confinement prior to his assignment.

Plaintiff then contends that on January 25, 2016, Defendant Adams conducted a search of Plaintiff's cell and left it in disarray. When Plaintiff asked for a grievance form, Defendant Adams allegedly refused to give it to him and instead replied, "My dad runs the prison, what a grievance [sic]?" (Id. at p. 7.) Following this incident, Defendant Adams then began to harass Plaintiff by writing him up with false disciplinary reports and continuing to refuse him grievance forms. (Id. at p. 16.)

Furthermore, Plaintiff alleges that prison officials exposed Plaintiff to danger by forcing him to share a cell with another inmate, having faulty emergency call buttons, and denying medical care when his roommate attacked him with a razor. (Id. at p. 8.) Plaintiff also alleges that following this altercation with his cellmate, Defendants upgraded him to the Tier II, Phase One unit, again without providing him an opportunity to contest the assignment. (Id. at p. 11.)

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<sup>1</sup> The below recited facts are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint and are accepted as true, as they must be at this stage.

## STANDARD OF REVIEW

Plaintiff seeks to bring this action *in forma pauperis* under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1), the Court may authorize the filing of a civil lawsuit without the prepayment of fees if the plaintiff submits an affidavit that includes a statement of all of his assets, shows an inability to pay the filing fee, and also includes a statement of the nature of the action which shows that he is entitled to redress. Even if the plaintiff proves indigence, the Court must dismiss the action if it is frivolous or malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)–(ii). Additionally, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the Court must review a complaint in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity. Upon such screening, the Court must dismiss a complaint, or any portion thereof, that is frivolous or malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted or which seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

The Court looks to the instructions for pleading contained in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure when reviewing a Complaint on an application to proceed *in forma pauperis*. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 8 (“A pleading that states a claim for relief must contain [among other things] . . . a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.”); Fed. R. Civ. P. 10 (requiring that claims be set forth in numbered paragraphs, each limited to a single set of circumstances). Further, a claim is frivolous under Section 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) “if it is ‘without arguable merit either in law or fact.’” Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002) (quoting Bilal v. Driver, 251 F.3d 1346, 1349 (11th Cir. 2001)).

Whether a complaint fails to state a claim under Section 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) is governed by the same standard applicable to motions to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). Thompson v. Rundle, 393 F. App’x 675, 678 (11th Cir. 2010). Under that

standard, this Court must determine whether the complaint contains “sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to ‘state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.’” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). A plaintiff must assert “more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not” suffice. Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555. Section 1915 also “accords judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless.” Bilal, 251 F.3d at 1349 (quoting Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989)).

In its analysis, the Court will abide by the long-standing principle that the pleadings of unrepresented parties are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys and, therefore, must be liberally construed. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972); Boxer X v. Harris, 437 F.3d 1107, 1110 (11th Cir. 2006) (“*Pro se* pleadings are held to a less stringent standard than pleadings drafted by attorneys.”) (emphasis omitted) (quoting Hughes v. Lott, 350 F.3d 1157, 1160 (11th Cir. 2003)). However, Plaintiff’s unrepresented status will not excuse mistakes regarding procedural rules. McNeil v. United States, 508 U.S. 106, 113 (1993) (“We have never suggested that procedural rules in ordinary civil litigation should be interpreted so as to excuse mistakes by those who proceed without counsel.”).

## **DISCUSSION**

As an initial matter, this Court must give deference to prison officials on matters of prison administration. Courts traditionally are reluctant to interfere with prison administration and discipline, unless there is a clear abuse of discretion. See Procunier v. Martinez, 416 U.S. 396, 404–05 (1974) (“Traditionally, federal courts have adopted a broad hands-off attitude

toward problems of prison administration [because] . . . courts are ill equipped to deal with the increasingly urgent problems of prison administration and reform.”), *overruled on other grounds* by Thornburgh v. Abbott, 490 U.S. 401 (1989). In such cases, “[d]eference to prison authorities is especially appropriate.” Newman v. Ala., 683 F.2d 1312, 1320–21 (11th Cir. 1982) (reversing district court’s injunction requiring release of prisoners on probation because it “involved the court in the operation of the State’s system of criminal justice to a greater extent than necessary” and less intrusive equitable remedy was available); *see also* Thornburgh, 490 U.S. at 407–08 (“Acknowledging the expertise of these officials and that the judiciary is ‘ill equipped’ to deal with the difficult and delicate problems of prison management, this Court has afforded considerable deference to the determinations of prison administrators who, in the interest of security, regulate the relations between prisoners and the outside world.”); Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 547 (1979) (acknowledging that courts have “accorded wide-ranging deference [to prison administrators] in adoption and execution of policies and practices that in their judgment are needed to preserve internal order and discipline and to maintain institutional security.”); Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners’ Labor Union, 433 U.S. 119, 129 (1977) (“Prison officials must be free to take appropriate action to ensure the safety of inmates and corrections personnel and to prevent escape or unauthorized entry.”); Bradley v. Hart, No. CV513-127, 2015 WL 1032926, at \*10 (S.D. Ga. Mar. 9, 2015) (“It does not appear to be appropriate for this Court to order that prison officials remove entries from Plaintiff’s file, which may or may not be accurate.”).

Further, in order to state a claim for relief under Section 1983, a plaintiff must satisfy two elements. First, a plaintiff must allege that an act or omission deprived him “of some right, privilege, or immunity secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States.” Hale v.

Tallapoosa Cty., 50 F.3d 1579, 1582 (11th Cir. 1995). Second, a plaintiff must allege that the act or omission was committed by “a person acting under color of state law.” Id. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants violated his Fourteenth Amendment due process rights, Eighth Amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment, and his First Amendment right to free speech. As a result, he requests declaratory and injunctive relief, as well as compensatory and punitive damages. The Court will assess each of Plaintiff’s claims and requests in turn.

**I. Claims for Monetary Damages Against Defendants in Their Official Capacities**

Plaintiff cannot sustain a Section 1983 claim for monetary damages against Defendants in their official capacities. States are immune from private suits pursuant to the Eleventh Amendment and traditional principles of state sovereignty. Alden v. Maine, 527 U.S. 706, 712–13 (1999). Section 1983 does not abrogate the well-established immunities of a state from suit without its consent. Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 67 (1989). Because a lawsuit against a state officer in his official capacity is “no different from a suit against the [s]tate itself,” such a defendant is immune from suit under Section 1983. Id. at 71. Here, the State of Georgia would be the real party in interest in a suit against Defendants in their official capacities as employees of the Georgia Department of Corrections. Accordingly, the Eleventh Amendment immunizes these actors from suit in their official capacities. See Free v. Granger, 887 F.2d 1552, 1557 (11th Cir. 1989). Absent a waiver of that immunity, Plaintiff cannot sustain any constitutional claims against Defendants in their official capacities for monetary relief. The Court should **DISMISS** these claims.

## II. Claims Against Homer Bryson

Section 1983 liability must be based on something more than a defendant's supervisory position or a theory of respondeat superior.<sup>2</sup> Bryant v. Jones, 575 F.3d 1281, 1299 (11th Cir. 2009); Braddy v. Fla. Dep't of Labor & Employment Sec., 133 F.3d 797, 801 (11th Cir. 1998). A supervisor may be liable only through personal participation in the alleged constitutional violation or when there is a causal connection between the supervisor's conduct and the alleged violations. Id. at 802. "To state a claim against a supervisory defendant, the plaintiff must allege (1) the supervisor's personal involvement in the violation of his constitutional rights, (2) the existence of a custom or policy that resulted in deliberate indifference to the plaintiff's constitutional rights, (3) facts supporting an inference that the supervisor directed the unlawful action or knowingly failed to prevent it, or (4) a history of widespread abuse that put the supervisor on notice of an alleged deprivation that he then failed to correct." Barr v. Gee, 437 F. App'x 865, 875 (11th Cir. 2011).

It appears Plaintiff wishes to hold Homer Bryson liable based solely on his position as Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Corrections. Plaintiff only mentions Defendant Bryson in the context of being "legally responsible for the overall operation of the Department and each institution under its jurisdiction." (Doc. 1-1, p. 2.) He alleges no other facts to indicate whether Bryson was personally involved in the violation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights or that the alleged violations of his rights were the result of a policy Defendant Bryson enacted. Thus, the Court should **DISMISS** Plaintiff's claims against Defendant Bryson in their entirety.

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<sup>2</sup> The principle that respondeat superior is not a cognizable theory of liability under Section 1983 holds true regardless of whether the entity sued is a state, municipal, or private corporation. Harvey v. Harvey, 949 F.2d 1127, 1129-30 (11th Cir.1992).

### III. Claims for Compensatory and Punitive Damages

“No Federal civil action may be brought by a prisoner confined in a jail, prison, or other correctional facility, for mental or emotional injury suffered while in custody without a prior showing of physical injury.” 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(e). The purpose of this statute is “to reduce the number of frivolous cases filed by imprisoned plaintiffs, who have little to lose and excessive amounts of free time with which to pursue their complaints.” Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002) (citing Harris v. Garner, 216 F.3d 970, 976-79 (11th Cir. 2000)). “Tracking the language of [this] statute, § 1997e(e) applies only to lawsuits involving (1) Federal civil actions (2) brought by a prisoner (3) for mental or emotional injury (4) suffered while in custody.” Id. at 532.

In Williams v. Brown, 347 F. App’x 429, 436 (11th Cir. 2009), the Eleventh Circuit stated that, “compensatory damages under § 1983 may be awarded only based on actual injuries caused by the defendant and cannot be presumed or based on the abstract value of the constitutional rights that the defendant violated. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(e), in order to recover for mental or emotional injury suffered while in custody, a prisoner bringing a § 1983 action must demonstrate more than a *de minim[i]s* physical injury.” Id. (internal citations omitted) (alterations in original). Consequently, a prisoner that has not suffered any physical injury cannot recover compensatory or punitive damages. Al-Amin v. Smith, 637 F.3d 1192, 1199 (11th Cir. 2011) (“In sum, our published precedents have affirmed district court dismissals of punitive damage claims under the PLRA because the plaintiffs failed to meet § 1997e(e)’s physical injury requirement.”); Smith v. Allen, 502 F.3d 1255, 1271 (11th Cir. 2007) (“Plaintiff seeks nominal, compensatory, and punitive damages. It is clear from our case law, however, that



the latter two types of damages are precluded under the PLRA.”), *abrogated on other grounds by Sossamon v. Texas*, 563 U.S. 277 (2011).

However, the Eleventh Circuit has also stated that “[n]ominal damages are appropriate if a plaintiff establishes a violation of a fundamental constitutional right, even if he cannot prove actual injury sufficient to entitle him to compensatory damages.” *Williams v. Brown*, 347 F. App’x at 436 (quoting *Hughes v. Lott*, 350 F.3d 1157, 1162 (11th Cir. 2003)). “Thus, a prayer for nominal damages is not precluded by § 1997e(e).” *Id.* (quoting *Smith v. Allen*, 502 F.3d at 1271).

As described in further detail below, Plaintiff only alleges *de minimis* injuries resulting from Defendants’ constitutional violations. Accordingly, the Court should **DISMISS** his claims for compensatory and punitive damages pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(e). However, Section 1997e(e) does not bar Plaintiff’s claims for nominal damages or injunctive relief, and those claims will proceed.

#### **IV. Due Process Claims**

##### **A. Procedural Due Process**

An inmate states a cognizable claim for the deprivation of his procedural due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment when he alleges the deprivation of a constitutionally protected liberty or property interest, state action, and constitutionally inadequate process. *Shaarbay v. Palm Beach Cty. Jail*, 350 F. App’x 359, 361 (11th Cir. 2009) (citing *Cryder v. Oxendine*, 24 F.3d 175, 177 (11th Cir. 1994)). “Prison disciplinary proceedings are not part of a criminal prosecution, and the full panoply of rights due a defendant in such proceedings does not apply.” *Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 556, (1974). Rather, “a disciplinary proceeding, whose outcome will ‘impose[ ] atypical and significant hardship on the inmate’ must ensure the

following due process rights: (1) advance written notice of the claimed violation, (2) a written statement by the fact finders as to the evidence relied upon and the reasons for the disciplinary action taken, and (3) an opportunity to call witnesses and present documentary evidence in his defense.” Asad v. Crosby, 158 F. App’x 166, 173 (11th Cir. 2005) (citing Wolff, 418 U.S. at 563–67).

This Court has held that an inmate’s placement in administrative segregation is ordinarily a non-punitive action. Bradley v. Hart, No. CV513-127, 2015 WL 1032926, at \*5 (S.D. Ga. Mar. 9, 2015), *appeal dismissed* (July 8, 2015). However, Plaintiff has alleged facts that could plausibly establish that his placement in the Tier II Unit was punitive in nature. Additionally, Plaintiff has arguably alleged that his placement in the Tier II Unit has resulted in an atypical or significant hardship. Further, Plaintiff alleges facts that could establish that he was denied sufficient process. For all of these reasons, he arguably states a cognizable claim for denial of procedural due process.

#### **B. Substantive Due Process**

“The Due Process Clause protects against deprivations of ‘life, liberty, or property without due process of law.’” Kirby v. Siegelman, 195 F.3d 1285, 1290 (11th Cir. 1999) (quoting U.S. Const. Amend. XIV). The Supreme Court has identified two situations in which a prisoner can be deprived of liberty such that the protection of due process is required: (1) there is a change in the prisoner’s conditions of confinement so severe that it essentially exceeds the sentence imposed by the court; and (2) the State has consistently given a benefit to prisoners, usually through a statute or administrative policy, and the deprivation of that benefit “imposes atypical and significant hardship on the inmate in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.” Id. at 1290–91 (quoting Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472, 484 (1995)).

In Sandin, the United States Supreme Court addressed whether the punishment inmate Conner received for a disciplinary violation was sufficient to invoke a liberty interest protected by the Due Process Clause. 515 U.S. at 472. Following a disciplinary conviction, Conner received 30 days' disciplinary segregation in a Special Housing Unit. Id. at 475. After noting that the segregation was a form of punishment, the Court concluded that it was not a dramatic departure from the conditions of Conner's indeterminate sentence. Id. at 485. The Supreme Court held there is no right inherent in the Due Process Clause for an inmate not to be placed in disciplinary segregation nor is there a state-created liberty interest to be free from disciplinary segregation. Id. at 487. The Court determined that the conditions of disciplinary segregation at the prison where Conner was incarcerated were virtually indistinguishable from the conditions of administrative segregation and protective custody. Id. at 486. Also, the Court noted that the conditions of disciplinary segregation were not markedly different from the conditions in general population. Id. The Court concluded that the conditions of disciplinary segregation did not impose an "atypical, significant deprivation in which a State might conceivably create a liberty interest." Id. Thus, the Court determined that Conner was not entitled to due process protection. Id. at 487.

The Court observed that this holding was a return to the due process principles of Wolff v. McDonnell, 418 U.S. 539, (1974), and Meachum v. Fano, 427 U.S. 215 (1976), which required an inmate to suffer a "grievous loss" before a liberty interest could be found. Id. at 478–83. The Sandin Court ruled that in the future, liberty interests "will be generally limited to freedom from restraint which, while not exceeding the sentence in such an unexpected manner as to give rise to protection by the Due Process Clause of its own force, (citations omitted), nonetheless imposes atypical and significant hardship on the inmate in relation to the ordinary

incidents of prison life.” Id. at 480, 484; see also Rodgers v. Singletary, 142 F.3d 1252, 1253 (11th Cir. 1998) (affirming that two months’ confinement to administrative segregation was not a deprivation of a constitutionally protected liberty interest).

An inmate, therefore, has a liberty interest related to his confinement in segregation only if the state has created a liberty interest through the nature of the conditions. Sandin, 515 U.S. at 487. To determine whether the state has created a liberty interest, courts must look to the nature of the conditions of the confinement in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life, rather than to the language of the regulations regarding those conditions. Id. at 484; Wallace v. Hamrick, 229 F. App’x 827, 830 (11th Cir. 2007). Courts should also consider the duration of the confinement in segregation when determining if the confinement constitutes an atypical and significant hardship. See Al-Amin v. Donald, 165 F. App’x 733, 738 (11th Cir. 2006); see also Williams v. Fountain, 77 F.3d 372, 374 (11th Cir. 1996).

In the present action, Plaintiff has plausibly alleged that his placement in the Tier II Unit deprives him of a liberty interest. Plaintiff arguably sets forth facts which could lead to the conclusion that the conditions of the Tier II Unit impose an atypical and significant hardship on him relative to the ordinary incidents of prison life. Unlike the inmate in Sandin, Plaintiff plausibly alleges that the conditions in the Tier II Unit are markedly different from the conditions in general population. For all of these reasons, Plaintiff has alleged sufficient facts for his substantive due process claims to proceed against Defendants.

## **V. Eighth Amendment Claims**

### **A. Assignment to Administrative Confinement**

The cruel and unusual punishment standard of the Eighth Amendment requires prison officials to “ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care.”

Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994). Generally speaking, however, “prison conditions rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation only when they involve the wanton and unnecessary infliction of pain.” Chandler v. Crosby, 379 F.3d 1278, 1289 (11th Cir. 2004) (quotations omitted). Thus, not all deficiencies and inadequacies in prison conditions amount to a violation of a prisoner’s constitutional rights. Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 349 (1981). The Constitution does not mandate comfortable prisons. Id. Prison conditions violate the Eighth Amendment only when the prisoner is deprived of “the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” Id. at 347.

Even accepting Plaintiff’s assertions that Defendants arbitrarily placed him in administrative confinement and that the conditions are “atypical” and significantly different from the general prison population, he fails to plausibly state an Eighth Amendment claim. (Doc. 1-1, pp. 5, 13.) The conditions imposed in “administrative segregation and solitary confinement do not, in and of themselves, constitute cruel and unusual punishment.” Sheley v. Dugger, 833 F.2d 1420, 1428–29 (11th Cir. 1987); see also Gholston v. Humphrey, No. 5:12–CV–97–MTT–MSH, 2014 WL 4976248, at \*3 (M.D. Ga. Oct. 3, 2014) (dismissing prisoner’s claims that his transfer to SMU with more restrictive conditions without a “legitimate penological justification” amounts to an Eighth Amendment violation); Anthony v. Brown, No. CV 113–058, 2013 WL 3778360, at \*2 (S.D. Ga. July 17, 2013) (dismissing on frivolity review Eighth Amendment claims based on conditions of confinement in crisis stabilization unit). As detailed above, an Eighth Amendment violation requires the prisoner to allege that he is deprived of “the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” Rhodes, 452 U.S. at 349. Plaintiff does not plausibly allege that the conditions of his confinement in administrative segregation fall below this standard.

Accordingly, the Court should **DISMISS** Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment conditions of confinement claims based upon his placement in administrative confinement.

**B. Deliberate Indifference Claim Based on Failure to Protect**

The Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment imposes a constitutional duty upon prison officials to take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of prison inmates. "To show a violation of [his] Eighth Amendment rights, [a p]laintiff must produce sufficient evidence of (1) a substantial risk of serious harm; (2) the defendants' deliberate indifference to that risk; and (3) causation." Smith v. Reg'l Dir. of Fla. Dep't of Corr., 368 F. App'x 9, 14 (11th Cir. 2010) (quoting Purcell ex rel. Estate of Morgan v. Toombs Cty., 400 F.3d 1313, 1319 (11th Cir. 2005)). "To be deliberately indifferent a prison official must know of and disregard 'an excessive risk to inmate health or safety; the official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference.'" Id. (quoting Purcell, 400 F.3d at 1319–20).

Whether a substantial risk of serious harm exists so that the Eighth Amendment might be violated involves a legal rule that takes form through its application to facts. However, "simple negligence is not actionable under § 1983, and a plaintiff must allege a conscious or callous indifference to a prisoner's rights." Smith, 368 F. App'x at 14. In other words, "to find deliberate indifference on the part of a prison official, a plaintiff inmate must show: (1) subjective knowledge of a risk of serious harm; (2) disregard of that risk; (3) by conduct that is more than gross negligence." Thomas v. Bryant, 614 F.3d 1288, 1312 (11th Cir. 2010).

Like any deliberate indifference claim, a plaintiff must satisfy both an objective and a subjective inquiry. Chandler v. Crosby, 379 F.3d 1278, 1289–90 (11th Cir. 2004). Under the objective component, a plaintiff must prove the condition he complains of is sufficiently serious

to violate the Eighth Amendment. Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 8 (1992). As for the subjective component, “the prisoner must prove that the prison official acted with ‘deliberate indifference.’” Miller v. King, 384 F.3d 1248, 1260–61 (11th Cir. 2004) (quoting Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1994)). To prove deliberate indifference, the prisoner must show that prison officials “‘acted with a sufficiently culpable state of mind’” with regard to the serious prison condition at issue. Id. (quoting Chandler, 379 F.3d at 1289–90).

Prison officials are not held liable for every attack by one inmate upon another, Zatler v. Wainwright, 802 F.2d 397, 400 (11th Cir. 1986), nor are they guarantors of a prisoner’s safety. Popham v. City of Talladega, 908 F.2d 1561, 1564 (11th Cir. 1990). Rather, a prison official must be faced with a known risk of injury that rises to the level of a “strong likelihood rather than a mere possibility” before his failure to protect an inmate can be said to constitute deliberate indifference. Brown v. Hughes, 894 F.2d 1533, 1537 (11th Cir. 1990).

Plaintiff makes a conclusory allegation that prison officials “expos[ed] the plaintiff to levels of violence” by assigning another inmate to his cell. (Doc. 1-1, p. 7.) However, a review of Plaintiff’s Complaint fails to reveal any allegation indicating that Defendants were subjectively aware of any objective risk to Plaintiff’s safety prior to the attack. Plaintiff simply makes another conclusory statement that, “[D]efendants had knowledge of the risk that the plaintiff face of assault [sic] and ignored it.” (Id. at p. 11.)

Plaintiff also alleges that Defendants failed to protect him because they did not follow Standard Operating Procedure by failing to regularly patrol and inspect the cells and maintain the emergency call buttons. (Doc. 1-1, p. 8.) However, these allegations of negligence fail to rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation. “It is obduracy and wantonness, not inadvertence or error in good faith, that characterize the conduct prohibited by the Cruel and Unusual

Punishment[ ] Clause.” McCoy v. Webster, 47 F.3d 404, 408 (11th Cir. 1995). Thus, to constitute cruel and unusual punishment, “conduct that does not purport to be punishment . . . must involve more than ordinary lack of due care for the prisoner’s interests or safety.” Whitley v. Albers, 475 U.S. 312, 319 (1986). In other words, “[m]erely negligent failure to protect an inmate from attack does not justify liability under [42 U.S.C.] § 1983.” Stuckey v. Thompson, No. CV405-216, 2007 WL 1035134, at \*5 (S.D. Ga. Mar. 29, 2007) (citing Brown v. Hughes, 894 F.2d 1533, 1537 (11th Cir. 1990)). Plaintiff has not presented facts sufficient to show that Defendants acted with more than gross negligence by failing to patrol the cells or maintain the emergency call buttons. See Patton v. Corr. Officer Rowell, No. 5:15-cv-25, 2015 WL 9916161, at \*5 (S.D. Ga. Dec. 16, 2015) (“[W]hile Defendants’ violations of standard operating procedures and failure to check to be certain that all cells were locked may constitute *negligence*, they do not support deliberate indifference claims under the Eighth Amendment.”) (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the Court should **DISMISS** Plaintiff’s Eight Amendment claims based on a theory of a failure to protect.

### **C. Deliberate Indifference Claim Based on Inadequate Medical Care**

As stated above, the Eighth Amendment’s proscription against cruel and unusual punishment imposes a constitutional duty upon a prison official to take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of inmates. The cruel and unusual punishment standard of the Eighth Amendment requires prison officials to “ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care.” Farmer, 511 U.S. at 832.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Marsh v. Butler Cty., 268 F.3d 1014 (11th Cir. 2001) (en banc), *abrogated on other grounds by* Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007).



In the medical care context, the standard for cruel and unusual punishment, embodied in the principles expressed in Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976), is whether a prison official exhibits a deliberate indifference to the serious medical needs of an inmate. Farmer, 511 U.S. at 828. However, “not every claim by a prisoner that he has not received adequate medical treatment states a violation of the Eighth Amendment.” Harris v. Thigpen, 941 F.2d 1495, 1505 (11th Cir. 1991) (quoting Estelle, 429 U.S. at 105). Rather, “an inmate must allege acts or omissions sufficiently harmful to evidence deliberate indifference to serious medical needs.” Hill v. DeKalb Reg’l Youth Det. Ctr., 40 F.3d 1176, 1186 (11th Cir. 1994).

In order to prove a deliberate indifference claim, a prisoner must overcome three obstacles. The prisoner must: 1) “satisfy the objective component by showing that [he] had a serious medical need”; 2) “satisfy the subjective component by showing that the prison official acted with deliberate indifference to [his] serious medical need”; and 3) “show that the injury was caused by the defendant’s wrongful conduct.” Goebert v. Lee Cty., 510 F.3d 1312, 1326 (11th Cir. 2007). A medical need is serious if it “‘has been diagnosed by a physician as *mandating* treatment or [is] one that is so obvious that even a lay person would easily recognize the necessity for a doctor’s attention.’” Id. (quoting Hill, 40 F.3d at 1187) (emphasis supplied). As for the subjective component, the Eleventh Circuit has consistently required that “a defendant know of and disregard an excessive risk to an inmate’s health and safety.” Haney v. City of Cumming, 69 F.3d 1098, 1102 (11th Cir. 1995). Under the subjective prong, an inmate “must prove three things: (1) subjective knowledge of a risk of serious harm; (2) disregard of that risk; (3) by conduct that is more than [gross] negligence.” Goebert, 510 F.3d at 1327.

“The meaning of ‘more than gross negligence’ is not self-evident[.]” Id. In instances where a deliberate indifference claim turns on a delay in treatment rather than the type of

medical care received, the factors considered are: “(1) the seriousness of the medical need; (2) whether the delay worsened the medical condition; and (3) the reason for the delay.” Id. “When the claim turns on the quality of the treatment provided, there is no constitutional violation as long as the medical care provided to the inmate is ‘minimally adequate.’” Blanchard v. White Cty. Det. Ctr. Staff, 262 F. App’x 959, 964 (11th Cir. 2008) (quoting Harris, 941 F.2d at 1504). “Deliberate indifference is not established where an inmate received care but desired different modes of treatment.” Id.

In this case, Plaintiff does not allege enough to support his contention that Defendants disregarded his medical needs or that he even had a serious medical need. Plaintiff states that he received “multiple incisions” to his face. (Doc. 1-1, pp. 8.) However, he fails to sufficiently allege that these incisions were so grave that they rose to the level of a serious medical need. For instance, courts have repeatedly found that injuries similar to Plaintiff’s do not cross Section 1997e(e)’s *de minimis* threshold. See, e.g., Tate v. Rockford, 497 F. App’x 921, 925 (11th Cir. 2012) (laceration on plaintiff’s forehead, several abrasions and cuts, and a swollen right eye were considered *de minimis* injuries); Mosley v. Medlin, No. CV 313-086, 2015 WL 106230, at \*3 (S.D. Ga. Jan. 7, 2015) (“In this case, Plaintiff alleges only a contusion that was healed by the time he was transferred to another facility. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s “physical injury” may not be considered greater than *de minimis*.”); see also Thompson v. Sec’y, Fla. Dep’t of Corr., 551 F. App’x 555, 557 n.3 (11th Cir. 2014) (describing an approach of asking whether the injury would require a free world person to visit an emergency room or doctor) (citing Luong v. Hatt, 979 F. Supp. 481, 486 (N.D. Tex. 1997) (“A physical injury is an observable or diagnosable medical condition requiring treatment by a medical care professional. It is not a sore muscle, an aching back, a scratch, an abrasion, a bruise, etc., which lasts even up to two or three weeks.”)).

Furthermore, even if Plaintiff had alleged a serious medical need, he failed to allege that prison officials disregarded that need. Rather, he states that prison officials took him to the medical unit just twenty minutes after they arrived to break up the altercation. (Doc. 1-1, pp. 11.)

Thus, Plaintiff has not alleged sufficient facts to state a cognizable Eighth Amendment claim for denial of medical care, and the Court should **DISMISS** those claims.

## **VI. Retaliation**

“It is an established principle of constitutional law that an inmate is considered to be exercising his First Amendment right of freedom of speech when he complains to the prison’s administrators about the conditions of his confinement.” O’Bryant v. Finch, 637 F.3d 1207, 1212 (11th Cir. 2011). It is also established that an inmate may maintain a cause of action against prison administrators who retaliate against him for making such complaints. Id. (quoting Smith v. Mosley, 532 F.3d 1270, 1276 (11th Cir. 2008) (internal citation and punctuation omitted)). “To establish a First Amendment retaliation claim, a prisoner need not allege the violation of an additional separate and distinct constitutional right; instead, the core of the claim is that the prisoner is being retaliated against for exercising his right to free speech.” O’Bryant, 637 F.3d at 1212. “To prevail, the inmate must establish these elements: (1) his speech was constitutionally protected; (2) the inmate suffered adverse action such that the administrator’s allegedly retaliatory conduct would likely deter a person of ordinary firmness from engaging in such speech; and (3) there is a causal relationship between the retaliatory action and the protected speech.” Smith, 532 F.3d at 1276 (citing Bennett v. Hendrix, 423 F.3d 1247, 1250, 1254 (11th Cir. 2005)).

Here, Plaintiff’s filing of grievances against Defendant Adams for searching his cell is constitutionally protected speech. Additionally, Plaintiff arguably asserts that a prisoner of

“ordinary firmness” may have been deterred from exercising his First Amendment rights based on Defendant Adams’s actions. Bennett, 423 F.3d at 1252 (noting “adverse effect” depends on the context of the alleged action and focuses on “the status of the speaker, the status of the retaliator, the relationship between the speaker and the retaliator, and the nature of the retaliatory acts[ ]”) (citing Thaddeus-X v. Blatter, 175 F.3d 378, 398 (6th Cir. 1999)). Plaintiff alleges that, when he tried to file a grievance based on actions taken by Defendant Adams, Defendant Adams first refused to provide a grievance form and then afterwards retaliated by allegedly writing false disciplinary reports for Plaintiff and taking away his personal items. (Doc. 1-1, pp. 7, 14–17.) Thus, Plaintiff has stated facts which plausibly allege a First Amendment retaliation claim against Defendant Adams, and this claim remains pending.

## **VII. Motion for a Preliminary Injunction**

Plaintiff filed a Motion for Preliminary Injunction on June 22, 2016, asking to be released from segregation. (Doc. 6.) To be entitled to a preliminary injunction, the movant must show: (1) a substantial likelihood of ultimate success on the merits; (2) an injunction or protective order is necessary to prevent irreparable injury; (3) the threatened injury outweighs the harm the injunction or protective order would inflict on the non-movant; and (4) the injunction or protective order would not be adverse to the public interest. Schiavo ex rel. Schindler v. Schiavo, 403 F.3d 1223, 1225–26 (11th Cir. 2005). In this Circuit, an “injunction is an extraordinary and drastic remedy not to be granted unless the movant clearly established the ‘burden of persuasion’ as to the four requisites.” Horton v. City of Augustine, Fla., 272 F.3d 1318, 1326 (11th Cir. 2001).

Plaintiff has failed to make a sufficient showing entitling him to the extraordinary remedy of a preliminary injunction. Specifically, he has failed to show that he has a substantial likelihood of ultimate success on the merits of his claims. Accordingly, the Court should **DENY** his request for a preliminary injunction. This is not to say that Plaintiff will not be able to ultimately obtain injunctive relief in this case. However, he is not entitled to such relief at this time.

### **VIII. Declaratory Judgment**

Plaintiff also requests this Court enter a judgment declaring that the acts and omissions of Defendants violate the Constitution and the laws of the United States. (Doc. 1-1, p. 19.) “In a case of actual controversy within its jurisdiction . . . any court of the United States, upon the filing of an appropriate pleading, may declare the rights and other legal relations of any interested party seeking such declaration, whether or not further relief is or could be sought. Any such declaration shall have the force and effect of a final judgment or decree and shall be reviewable as such.” 28 U.S.C. § 2201(a). The Declaratory Judgment Act “does not, of itself, confer jurisdiction upon the federal courts; a suit brought under the Act must state some independent source of jurisdiction[.]” Mata v. Sec’y of Dep’t of Homeland Sec., 426 F. App’x 698, 699 (11th Cir. 2011) (quoting Borden v. Katzman, 881 F.2d 1035, 1037 (11th Cir. 1989)).

A party who is seeking to invoke the court’s jurisdiction “must show: ‘(1) that [he] personally [has] suffered some actual or threatened injury as a result of the alleged conduct of the defendant; (2) that the injury fairly can be traced to the challenged action; and (3) that it is likely to be redressed by a favorable decision.’” Am. Ins. Co. v. Evercare Co., 430 F. App’x 795, 798 (11th Cir. 2011) (quoting GTE Directories Publ’g Corp. v. Trimen Am., Inc., 67 F.3d 1563, 1567 (11th Cir. 1995)). “[T]he question in each case is whether the facts alleged, under all the

circumstances, show that there is a substantial controversy, between parties having adverse legal interests, of sufficient immediacy and reality to warrant the issuance of a declaratory judgment.” Id. (internal citation and punctuation omitted). Plaintiff has not shown “sufficient immediacy,” an actual injury or threatened injury, or that a favorable decision would redress any purported injury he sustained at Ware State Prison. Therefore, the Court should also **DENY** Plaintiff’s request for a declaratory judgment.

### CONCLUSION

I **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff’s monetary damages claims against Defendants in their official capacities, all claims against Defendant Bryson, all punitive and compensatory damage claims, and Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment claims. Additionally, the Court should **DENY** Plaintiff’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction, (doc. 6), and claims for declaratory relief. However, Plaintiff states plausible Fourteenth Amendment due process claims against Defendants and plausible First Amendment claims against Defendant Adams.

The Court **ORDERS** any party seeking to object to this Report and Recommendation to file specific written objections within fourteen (14) days of the date on which this Report and Recommendation is entered. Any objections asserting that the Magistrate Judge failed to address any contention raised in the Complaint must also be included. Failure to do so will bar any later challenge or review of the factual findings or legal conclusions of the Magistrate Judge. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985). A copy of the objections must be served upon all other parties to the action.

Upon receipt of objections meeting the specificity requirement set out above, a United States District Judge will make a *de novo* determination of those portions of the report to which objection are made and may accept, reject, or modify in whole or in part, the findings or

recommendations made by the Magistrate Judge. Objections not meeting the specificity requirement set out above will not be considered by a District Judge. A party may not appeal a Magistrate Judge's report and recommendation directly to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Appeals may be made only from a final judgment entered by or at the direction of a District Judge. The Clerk of Court is **DIRECTED** to serve a copy of this Report and Recommendation upon Plaintiff.

### **REMAINING CLAIMS AND DEFENDANTS**

When read in the light most favorable to him, Plaintiff's allegations arguably state colorable claims for relief against Defendants Tom Gramiak, Edwina Johnson, John Boyett, Nathan Brooks, William Steedly, Austin Adams, Kimberly Lowe, and Unit Manager Cox for violating his Fourteenth Amendment rights. Additionally, Plaintiff arguably states a colorable claim for relief against Defendant Adams for violating his First Amendment rights. Consequently, a copy of this Order and Plaintiff's Complaint shall be served upon those Defendants by the United States Marshal without prepayment of costs. The Court also provides the following instructions to the parties regarding the remaining claims and Defendants that will apply to the remainder of this action and which the Court urges the parties to read and follow.

### **INSTRUCTIONS TO DEFENDANTS**

Because Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*, the undersigned directs that service be effected by the United States Marshal. Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(c)(3). In most cases, the marshal will first mail a copy of the complaint to the Defendant by first-class mail and request that the Defendant waive formal service of summons. Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(d); Local Rule 4.7. Individual and corporate defendants have a duty to avoid unnecessary costs of serving the summons, and any such defendant who fails to comply with the request for waiver must bear the costs of

personal service unless good cause can be shown for the failure to return the waiver. Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(d)(2). Generally, a defendant who timely returns the waiver is not required to answer the complaint until sixty (60) days after the date that the marshal sent the request for waiver. Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(d)(3).

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that Defendants are hereby granted leave of court to take the deposition of the Plaintiff upon oral examination. Fed. R. Civ. P. 30(a). Defendants are further advised that the Court's standard 140 day discovery period will commence upon the filing of the last answer. Local Rule 26.1. Defendants shall ensure that all discovery, including the Plaintiff's deposition and any other depositions in the case, is completed within that discovery period.

In the event that Defendants take the deposition of any other person, Defendants are ordered to comply with the requirements of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 30. As the Plaintiff will likely not be in attendance for such a deposition, Defendants shall notify Plaintiff of the deposition and advise him that he may serve on Defendants, in a sealed envelope, within ten (10) days of the notice of deposition, written questions the Plaintiff wishes to propound to the witness, if any. Defendants shall present such questions to the witness seriatim during the deposition. Fed. R. Civ. P. 30(c).

#### **INSTRUCTIONS TO PLAINTIFF**

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that Plaintiff shall serve upon Defendants or, if appearance has been entered by counsel, upon their attorneys, a copy of every further pleading or other document submitted for consideration by the Court. Plaintiff shall include with the original paper to be filed with the Clerk of Court a certificate stating the date on which a true and correct copy of any document was mailed to Defendants or their counsel. Fed. R. Civ. P. 5. "Every



pleading shall contain a caption setting forth the name of the court, the title of the action, [and] the file number.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a).

Plaintiff is charged with the responsibility of immediately informing this Court and defense counsel of any change of address during the pendency of this action. Local Rule 11.1. Failure to do so may result in dismissal of this case.

Plaintiff has the responsibility for pursuing this case. For example, if Plaintiff wishes to obtain facts and information about the case from Defendants, Plaintiff must initiate discovery. See generally, Fed. R. Civ. P. 26, *et seq.* The discovery period in this case will expire 140 days after the filing of the last answer. Local Rule 26.1. Plaintiff does not need the permission of the Court to begin discovery, and Plaintiff should begin discovery promptly and complete it within this time period. Local Rule 26.1. Discovery materials should **not** be filed routinely with the Clerk of Court; exceptions include: when the Court directs filing; when a party needs such materials in connection with a motion or response, and then only to the extent necessary; and when needed for use at trial. Local Rule 26.4.

Interrogatories are a practical method of discovery for incarcerated persons. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 33. Interrogatories may be served only on a party to the litigation, and, for the purposes of the instant case, this means that interrogatories should not be directed to persons or organizations who are not named as Defendants. Interrogatories are not to contain more than twenty-five (25) questions. Fed. R. Civ. P. 33(a). If Plaintiff wishes to propound more than twenty-five (25) interrogatories to a party, Plaintiff must have permission of the Court. If Plaintiff wishes to file a motion to compel, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 37, he should first contact the attorneys for Defendants and try to work out the problem; if Plaintiff proceeds with the motion to compel, he should also file a statement certifying that he has

contacted opposing counsel in a good faith effort to resolve any dispute about discovery. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c); 37(a)(2)(A); Local Rule 26.7.

Plaintiff has the responsibility for maintaining his own records of the case. If Plaintiff loses papers and needs new copies, he may obtain them from the Clerk of Court at the standard cost of fifty cents (\$.50) per page. **If Plaintiff seeks copies, he should request them directly from the Clerk of Court and is advised that the Court will authorize and require the collection of fees from his prison trust fund account to pay the cost of the copies at the aforementioned rate of fifty cents (\$.50) per page.**

If Plaintiff does not press his case forward, the Court may dismiss it for want of prosecution. Fed. R. Civ. P. 41; Local Rule 41.1.

It is Plaintiff's duty to cooperate fully in any discovery which may be initiated by Defendants. Upon no less than five (5) days' notice of the scheduled deposition date, the Plaintiff shall appear and permit his deposition to be taken and shall answer, under oath or solemn affirmation, any question which seeks information relevant to the subject matter of the pending action. Failing to answer questions at the deposition or giving evasive or incomplete responses to questions will not be tolerated and may subject Plaintiff to severe sanctions, including dismissal of this case.

As the case progresses, Plaintiff may receive a notice addressed to "counsel of record" directing the parties to prepare and submit a Joint Status Report and a Proposed Pretrial Order. A plaintiff proceeding without counsel may prepare and file a unilateral Status Report and is required to prepare and file his own version of the Proposed Pretrial Order. A plaintiff who is incarcerated shall not be required or entitled to attend any status or pretrial conference which may be scheduled by the Court.

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS TO PLAINTIFF REGARDING  
MOTIONS TO DISMISS AND MOTIONS FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT**

Under this Court's Local Rules, a party opposing a motion to dismiss shall file and serve his response to the motion within fourteen (14) days of its service. "Failure to respond shall indicate that there is no opposition to a motion." Local Rule 7.5. Therefore, if Plaintiff fails to respond to a motion to dismiss, the Court will assume that he does not oppose the Defendants' motion. Plaintiff's case may be dismissed for lack of prosecution if Plaintiff fails to respond to a motion to dismiss.

Plaintiff's response to a motion for summary judgment must be filed within twenty-one (21) days after service of the motion. Local Rules 7.5, 56.1. The failure to respond to such a motion shall indicate that there is no opposition to the motion. Furthermore, each material fact set forth in the Defendants' statement of material facts will be deemed admitted unless specifically controverted by an opposition statement. Should Defendants file a motion for summary judgment, Plaintiff is advised that he will have the burden of establishing the existence of a genuine dispute as to any material fact in this case. That burden cannot be carried by reliance on the conclusory allegations contained within the complaint. Should the Defendants' motion for summary judgment be supported by affidavit, Plaintiff must file counter-affidavits if he desires to contest the Defendants' statement of the facts. Should Plaintiff fail to file opposing affidavits setting forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine dispute for trial, any factual assertions made in Defendants' affidavits will be accepted as true and summary judgment may

be entered against the Plaintiff pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56.

**SO ORDERED** and **REPORTED** and **RECOMMENDED**, this 15th day of August,  
2016.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Stan Baker". The signature is stylized with a large "R" and "S" and a cursive "Baker".

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R. STAN BAKER  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA